

ORISON

Nadia Myre

November 8 – December 13, 2014

In a recess at the end of the room, enlarged images of scars are projected in a loop. Here, the stitched up scars follow one another in the wink of an eye. The vision is sweeping and rhythmic, not as monologic. You cannot dwell on a detail as you did in the main room. The cold medium creates a distance between what you choose to see and what is really to be seen. Universally speaking, this is poetic justice. Let go.

Made from finely carved strips of wood from Kitigan Zibi, a large basket filled with offerings is an invitation to a ceremony of potlatch. Medicine bags await visitors. The small red bundles contain tobacco or cedar, plants frequently used in ceremonial rites. Receive.

Gina Antonozzi

Translation: Colette Tougas

"Human beings are first and foremost constituted by language. Language expresses an inextinguishable desire to meet the Other... and to establish... communication." – Françoise Dolto

Born in Montreal, Nadia Myre is a multidisciplinary artist of Algonquin origin whose work can be seen on four continents. To probe notions of loss, desire, identity and memory, she has developed a semiotics of her own. Within it, the circularity of Aboriginal thinking is expressed in a renewed form of writing that draws us in as we become aware of our role in a cosmological ideal reaching beyond linguistic, emotional et relational dissonances.

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Nadia began her studies in 1997 at the Emily Carr School of Art and Design in Vancouver. Concurrently, through her mother's claiming of her own cultural identity, she gained recognition as a member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Native community. For the young artist that she was back then, this identification was not an aim in and of itself, but rather an opportunity to reappropriate a precious ancestral cultural heritage that should not be wasted. There, she found a vocabulary, an ancient know-how and, above all, the approval of values that were her own and allowed her to build herself.

In 2002 she completed an MA in visual arts at Concordia University. The same year, at OBORO, she began the ambitious project of beading the fifty-six printed pages of chapters 1 to 5 of the 1876 Indian Act of Canada, which was designed with the implicit intention of assimilation. To deconstruct the unacceptable, needles pierced every single letter of the document and replaced them with beads. The scale of the project was such that Nadia reached out for the help of volunteers. For three years, a great number of participants of all origins worked together around a table—a process recalling a collective healing ritual. Collectively, they perpetuated a traditional Native women practice. The experience went far beyond the personal and cultural fields, and proved so significant that it was almost impossible to anticipate its scope. Since then, a relational approach, involving participatory works, has been at the centre of Nadia's practice.

The Scar Project shows both a desire for intimacy and a quest for meaning. During almost ten years, Nadia invited people to embroider a personal scar, moral or physical, on a piece of canvas. 1400 wounds have been stitched up—1400 expressions of individual stories, carried and recorded by the artist, have been shared in this way. In a quest for identity or meaning, love or forgiveness, from *Indian Act* to *Orison*, an uninterrupted main thread reminds us that all things are interconnected and that what has been cut off can be tied anew. Through a retrospective gaze, Nadia gratefully con-

siders the rich content gathered in the course of nearly a decade. She presents it here as ground for what we share in common. This material has contributed to the writing of an introduction to a sensitive immersive experience to which she now invites us. The work is a continuum of our enduring desires to be healed or united, of our wishes to remember or forget. The transformation of personal stories has established the distance required to better appreciate the progress made. Look.

“Orison deals with the indelibility of memory and how events live on in our physical bodies,” notes Nadia. It is a place of remembering open to the Other; a prayer to be made or heard. In a gesture of gratitude, the image of **a string-wrapped stone** at the opening of the exhibition evokes the memory of grandfathers wisely guiding us towards a state of contemplation and listening. The installation plunges us in an indistinct, semi-dark space. The black walls push back physical boundaries and everything lurking in the dark appears in a state of weightlessness. A **beacon** sweeps across the space, progressively highlighting the stages you must cross to reach the state of orison. The first reference point is a red fishing **net**, hanging from the ceiling, which in an up-and-down motion releases what must be let go. Held down by stones whose circular arrangement recalls a sweat lodge ceremony, it gives breath to and punctuates the rhythm of our ascension. Breath in.

Seven large aluminum **plates** on which are mounted the digitized images of the unseen side of *Indian Act* are arranged on the walls around the room. Red thread unites them, recalling the link between all things. Seven—for the seven sacred teachings whose principles focus on harmony rather than individualism. Or for the generations before and after us. On these black plates that melt into the surrounding space, white thread materializes the beaders' impassive gestures. The marks are the signs of a primordial language, of words yet unspoken. It lets out an orchestrated whisper of voices chanting the scars' written secrets. They are the sound and breath needed to exult. Breath out.